

How does the foregoing help us understand the idea of the feminist revolution? Through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, women in the Indian subcontinent have resisted forced widowhood, the denial of education, forced marriage, sexual violence within and outside the family, and moralistic definitions of the private and public which disabled possibilities for building solidarity and fragmented common concerns. Tarabai Shinde, writing in fury over the conviction to death (later reduced to transportation to a penal settlement outside the state), of a young widow for the murder of her infant, in 1882, strikes one of the earliest notes of revolt, a defining moment in the paradigm of feminist insurgency, if we can call it that:

God brought this amazing universe into being, and he it was also who created men and women both. So is it true that only women's bodies are home to all kinds of wicked vices? Or have men got just the same faults as we find in women? I wanted this to be shown absolutely clearly, and that's the reason I've written this small book, to defend the honour of all my sister countrywomen. I'm not looking at particular castes or families here. It's a comparison just between women and men. (Shinde 1994/1882).

It was not one but countless revolts, insurgencies, and revolutions – against husbands, fathers, families, communities, castes and parties: Rukmabai, married in her minority, who repudiated the marriage when she attained adulthood and resisted a court order to return to her husband, courting arrest instead; Kandukuri Rajalakshmi who offered shelter to widows, arranged their re-marriages and assisted in child-birth when sexually abused widows arrived at her door pregnant; Duvvuri Subbamma who turned widowhood around and used the release from conjugality to spread the word of freedom and self-rule, going to jail several times, and when she was free, travelling on foot from one village to another carrying bundles of *khadi* on her head; Chityala Ailamma, poor with no formal education, a legend in the Telangana armed struggle in the 1940s, who resisted the usurpation of her land by landlords, and violence by the police to then declare: “There is nothing of my husband. Nothing of my son. It is my name that has stood. Wherever I go the [party] folk come and say, ‘one should be like Ailamma’”; or Sugra Humayun Mirza, a gifted poet who set up schools for girls and started an organization of Muslim women,

Anjuman-e-Khawateen, and was the only non-Hindu woman in the Hindu Women's Association (Volga e.a. 2001):

Who will care to visit my grave when I am gone?  
 Only the wind will raise its dust when I am gone.  
 No one knew my worth while I was alive;  
 No one will shed tears for me when I am gone.  
 The regret remains that my people ignored me,  
 But a voice will rise in protest from my grave, when I am gone.

Women have turned our world upside down ceaselessly. And it is a constant struggle for each new generation grappling with concerns that are constantly emerging, shifting, changing and taking new shape. We can scarcely forget that difference, diversity and pluralism provide the context for this struggle just as power, hegemony and violence in multifarious forms are pitted against the context and undermining it in a deep rooted antagonism.

The traditions of the heterodox sects and devotional movements like the Bhakti movement allowed women to transcend the physical constraints imposed on them by institutions of caste, marriage and female seclusion. Mirabai, Avvaiyar, Bahinabai and Lal Dhed were some of the few women who challenged notions of subservient wifehood and conjugality, central to the practice of orthodox Hinduism, in pursuit of a larger devotion that by definition meant they would inhabit a public space, and not be subject to normal restrictions of caste or patriarchy. This struggle was far from easy and was often met with violent opposition from the conservatives, but these women survived in their own lifetime and, through their work, for posterity. These women and others like them opened out a whole new world to women of their times and later, a world that they were free to inhabit on their own terms.

Debates on social reform in the nineteenth century revolved around women. There were several inflections in these debates. While Shinde marks a moment in the process of genealogy formation of a new womanhood, two other voices provide an interesting contrast, in terms of intent and understanding. Katherine Mayo, the American author of *Mother India* created a storm in the 1920s by launching on a polemical attack against Indian self rule, arguing centrally that the sexual depravity of the Hindu was at the root of India's problems, drawing

on the realities of child marriage, *sati*, the *devadasi* system, untouchability, etc., that were also the preoccupation of Indian reformers. While Mayo's portrayal of Indian society in the early twentieth century garnered much attention, in many ways Shinde was more scathing in her critique.

In the great orthodox Hindu majority, the girl looks for motherhood nine months after reaching puberty – or anywhere between the ages of fourteen and eighteen... She is also completely unlettered, her stock of knowledge comprising only of the ritual of worship of household idols, the rites of placation of the wrath of deities and evil spirits, and the detailed ceremony of the service of her husband, who is ritualistically her personal god.

As to the husband, he may be a child scarcely older than herself or he may be a widower of fifty, when first he requires of her his conjugal rights...

The infant... must look to his child mother for care. Ignorant of the laws of hygiene, guided only by the most primitive superstitions, she has no helpers in her task... Because of her place in the social system, child-bearing and matters of procreation are the woman's one interest in life, her one subject of conversation, be her caste high or low. Therefore, the child growing up in the home learns, from earliest grasp of word and act to dwell upon sex relations. (Mayo 1998/1927, 83-84)

Mapping the responses of Indian women (the examples she takes are primarily Hindu women) and of reformers on their behalf to the tumultuous changes of the early twentieth century, Margaret Cousins, in stark contrast to Mayo, wrote of Marwari girls riding on horseback in a procession of Marwari women on their way to an Anti Pardah Women's Conference in 1941; women cotton mill workers during the Madras Presidency meeting to demand a ban on polygamy; an office bearer of the All India Women's Conference persisting in her public duties a fortnight after the death of her husband, the only signifier of widowhood being the absence of the *puttu* (the sacred vermilion mark worn by Hindu men and unmarried and married Hindu girls/women, prohibited for widows) on her forehead; a Brahmin woman conducting afternoon classes for ladies in adult literacy; the talented daughter of an active social reformer being withdrawn from school and married off to the consternation of all around; a Brahmin woman who could in her child's and her own interests actually go through legal divorce proceedings when the marriage broke down because the marriage had

also been registered (under secular law in addition to the religious ceremony); 700 women – Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Parsees, Brahmins and Non Brahmins – dining together in a school courtyard in Bangalore, “self-released from inter-dining restrictions of community or caste”; and women participating in the Non Co-operation movement after convincing their husbands of their commitment to the cause of freedom (Cousins 1947, 116-120).

Cousins was a friend of India closely associated with both the nationalist movement and the Indian women’s movement in the early twentieth century. Mayo supported colonial rule and was widely perceived as someone who undermined the cause of freedom. Both Cousins and Mayo, despite political differences, represented two significant voices of modernity in that era, drawing on frameworks of rationality and progress of the European Enlightenment. Modernity was both “coeval with the idea of progress” and “the promise of development,” with imperialist and nationalists espousing its cause (Chakrabarty 2002, xix). While Cousins drew upon the moment of transition to the modern in her writing on Indian women, Mayo focused on realities prior to that moment, although even while she was writing the transition had already begun as Tarabai’s writing clearly demonstrates. Predictably therefore, Mayo’s *Mother India* created a storm. There were those who condemned Mayo’s writing as totally motivated and false, others who felt reform was necessary if for no other reason than to deny Mayo and her ilk of reason for writing about India in a derogatory fashion, and yet others who felt that everything Mayo said was absolutely true of orthodox Brahminism which had to be dismantled in order for a more egalitarian order with more democratic gender values to emerge. However, while many narratives of Hinduism in the colonial period focus on men’s efforts at social and religious reform, Shinde and other authors show that there was a growing subculture of resistance which was fashioned and nurtured by women, rarely spoken about, but radical and spontaneous; these subcultures were invisible to Mayo’s imperialist eye and to Cousins’ nationalist eye.

It is perhaps time now to define “revolution” in a way that captures the rich experience of women’s struggle to craft feminist revolutions. There is no one government, no single target, no elaborate planning or strategy; the movement was not completely spontaneous either, and there was no overtly violent overthrowing of previous

regimes. And yet, revolutions there have been. Not war and peace, and hence no victors and vanquished, but revolutions that held the promise of life and freedom, so rare and precious for women.

The National Dalit Women's Federation, formed in 1995, for instance, brings together the various perspectives in Dalit assertion and resistance, encapsulating a two hundred year history. The Federation interrogates upper caste, brahmanical hegemonies in inter-caste relations (particularly the antagonistic, often violent relations between upper castes and Dalit women, in a climate of increasing right wing nationalism) and Dalit patriarchies from within. This delineation of its mandate by the Federation brings into sharp focus current debates on the place of Dalit women in quotidian politics: should they have a quota within the quota earmarked for reserved categories, or should they have a quota within the quota reserved for women? That they have a right to both is rarely admitted.

What grew out of these various movements across the country were trenchant critiques of the established order – Dalit women rising in one voice against the State's liquor policy that flooded rural poor communities with cheap liquor while divesting them of land, fair wages and food subsidies; middle class women taking to the streets to protest against the rise in prices of essential commodities; Muslim women forming a women's *jamaat* and deciding on cases of domestic violence; Christian women demanding, deliberating on and securing a more equitable right to divorce; Adivasi women fighting and winning struggles for effective control over land; lesbian women campaigning for the decriminalization of homosexuality and the right to same sex relationships; women with disabilities fighting for recognition of their specific situation and rights; women struggling to conquer the night, and so many more. There is also in this field no distinction between the archetypal private and public realms. The ways in which the sexual division of labour travels between conjugality and the home, to work and struggle demonstrates the impossibility of containing women within boundaries, because the boundaries are constantly shifting back and forth with the women.

Even while this is true, rather because this is true, there is a deep disturbance, a rage at the "displacements" that seemingly unobtrusive inversions and subversions, nay, insurgencies by women in generation after generation, across caste, class and community push forward

relentlessly, and so I conclude with questions: What is the place of violence in the feminist revolution? What are the ways in which “justice” may be/have been imagined and realized? What are its paradoxes? How do the daily lives of individual women and the shared lives of collectivities in an era fractured by conflict and global wars of armies and capitalist production shape the idea of the feminist revolution itself?

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## **L'apprentissage de l'intersectionnalité avec des mouvements de femmes indigènes au Chiapas, Mexique**

**Sabine Masson**

Les contributions de Kalpana Kannabiran et Ochy Curiel s'inscrivent dans le renouvellement postcolonial des savoirs féministes et des études genre, impliquant la pluralisation: 1) des expériences des femmes en lien avec l'imbrication de rapports de pouvoir; 2) du projet de libération des femmes vers une conception décentrée des luttes, des pratiques de résistances et des processus de changement social.

Ce renouvellement de la pensée et de la pratique féministes convertit le genre en outil non pas complice mais dissident de la colonialité, par exemple en refusant d'alimenter l'idée d'un seul modèle (occidental) de développement-émancipation et d'une seule histoire (prenant source dans la première vague suffragiste européenne) des combats des femmes (sur la base de dichotomies coloniales opposant tradition/modernité-femmes du Sud/femmes du Nord, etc.).

Pour aller dans ce sens, les deux contributions se font écho en insistant sur: 1) une redéfinition de l'histoire des résistances des femmes vers une multiplicité, une continuité d'espaces et de pratiques contre le patriarcat raciste, de classe, de caste; 2) une reconstruction de la conceptualisation féministe: chez Kannabiran à travers l'analyse de la violence, chez Curiel par le lien entre théorie féministe et pratiques des femmes racialisées. Elles nous invitent à réfléchir sur un enjeu central de la critique postcoloniale: les conditions de production des savoirs (féministes).

Leurs analyses sur la violence et les mouvements des femmes en Inde, et sur l'histoire des pratiques de résistances des femmes racialisées aux États-Unis, en Amérique latine et aux Caraïbes, entrent en résonance avec mon propre apprentissage de l'intersectionnalité dans le contexte des luttes des femmes indigènes au Chiapas (Mexique). J'aimerais aborder ici ce que j'ai retiré de cette expérience pour repenser l'histoire et les concepts féministes dans leur intersectionnalité et dans le sens de leur décolonisation. Cette intervention s'appuie sur mes recherches au Chiapas et en Amérique centrale, ainsi que sur une pratique d'action sociale sur ces mêmes terrains. Ce commentaire est également délimité par ma position de femme blanche et universitaire.

Kalpana Kannabiran nous incite à revoir l'idée de révolution féministe par une périodisation non pas linéaire mais circulaire des histoires de résistances des femmes, pour saisir la continuité et la complexité des révoltes (contre le veuvage ou le mariage forcés, les pratiques de solidarité ou le détournement de rôles imposés) et leurs ancrages pluriels (femmes dalits et adivasis, femmes de classes moyennes, lesbiennes).

Les histoires des révoltes de femmes en Inde font écho aux pratiques de résistances des femmes et féministes racialisées en Amérique latine et aux Caraïbes contre l'esclavage et la colonisation que décrit Curiel: le marronnage domestique (avortements auto-pratiqués, gaspillages des produits domestiques, ralentissement des tâches, etc.).

Au Chiapas, ces pratiques rappellent l'histoire invisible des résistances quotidiennes «voilées» (De Vos 1997) des femmes indigènes contre le colonialisme, ayant permis la transmission orale de la langue et de la culture, la survie des peuples dans les zones de refuges (montagnes et forêt tropicale), l'insoumission aux autorités coloniales par la dispersion géographique, par le refus de se reproduire ou la sous-production agricole, etc. (Gall et Hernández 2004).

Les figures historiques de femmes ayant résisté à la domination en Inde, comme Kandukuri Rajalakshmi ou Duvvuri Subbamma, rappellent les praticiennes noires précurseuses des études postcoloniales décrites par Ochy Curiel telles que Maria Stewart, Sojourner Truth ou Rosa Parks.

Au Chiapas, on retrouve de telles figures chez Maria de la Candelaria ou Agustina Gómez Chechep, la première ayant inspiré et conduit une révolte indigène contre l'impôt colonial autour de 1700, la